Sep/Oct 2004 Vol. 14, No. 5

Punya and Pavana

A group of Bengalis have come. One of them has recently lost a child. He put the question to Bhagavan "Why did that child die so young? Is it his *karma* or our *karma* that we should have this grief?"

Bhagavan: "The *prarabdha* which the child had to work out in this life was over and so it passed away. So we may call it the child's *karma*. So far as you are concerned, it is open to you not to grieve over it, but to remain calm and unaffected by it, being convinced that the child was not yours but always only God's, that God gave and God took away." And in this connection Bhagavan took out the *Yoga Vasishta* in English to refer to the story of Punya and Pavana. Strange to say, when he casually opened the book, it actually opened at the story he had in mind. And from the book he asked me to read out the portion where Punya advises his brother Pavana not to grieve foolishly over the death of their parents, pointing out that Pavana had had innumerable births in the past, in each one of which he had a number of relations and that exactly as he is not mourning for the death of all those relations now, he should not now mourn for the death of their father either.

— Day by Day with Bhagavan, 18-9-45 Afternoon

The full story found in Swami Venkatesananda's Vasishta's Yoga *not only delightfully delineates on the transitoriness of bodily existence, but also describes the way to extricate ourselves from its hold.*

VASISTHA continued:

O Rama, in this connection there is an ancient legend which I shall narrate to you.

In the continent known as Jambudvipa there is a great mountain known as Mahendra. In the forests on the slopes of that mountain many holy men and sages lived. They had in fact brought down onto that mountain the river Vyoma Ganga (or Akasha Ganga) for their bath, drinking, etc. On the bank of this river there lived a holy man named Dirghatapa who was, as his name implies, the very embodiment of ceaseless austerity.

This ascetic had two sons named Punya and Pavana. Of these Punya had reached full enlightenment, but Pavana, though he had overcome ignorance, had not yet reached full enlightenment and hence he had semi-wisdom.

With the inexorable passage of invisible and intangible time, the sage Dirghatapa (who had freed himself from every form of attachment and craving) had grown in age and, even as a bird flies away from its cage, abandoned the body and reached the state of utter purity. Using the yogic method she had learned from him, his wife, too, followed him.

At this sudden departure of the parents Pavana was

sunk in grief and he wailed aloud inconsolably. Punya, on the other hand, performed the funeral ceremonies but remained unmoved by the bereavement. He approached his grieving brother, Pavana.

PUNYA said: Brother, why do you bring this dreadful sorrow upon yourself? The blindness of ignorance alone is the cause of this torrential downpour of tears from your eyes. Our father has departed from here along with our mother to that state of liberation or the highest state, which is natural to all beings and is the very being of those who have overcome the self. Why do you grieve when they have returned to their own nature? You have ignorantly bound yourself to the notions of 'father' and 'mother'; and yet you grieve for those who are liberated from such ignorance! He was not your father, nor was she your mother, nor were you their son. You have had countless fathers and mothers. They have had countless children. Countless have been your incarnations! And, if you wish to grieve over the death of parents, why do you not grieve for all those countless beings unceasingly?

Noble one, what you see as the world is only an illusory appearance. In truth there are neither friends nor relatives. Hence, there is neither death nor separation. All these wonderful signs of prosperity that you see around you are tricks, some of which last for three days and others for five days! With your keen intelligence enquire into the truth: abandon notions of 'I', 'you', etc., and of 'He is dead', 'He is gone'. All these are your own notions, not truth.

PUNYA continued:

These false notions of father, mother, friend, relative, etc., are swept aside by wisdom as dust is swept away by wind. These relatives are not based on truth, they are but words! If one is thought of as a friend, he is a friend; if he is thought of as the other, he is the other! When all this is seen as the one omnipresent being, where is the distinction between the friend and the other?

Brother, enquire within yourself: this body is inert and it is composed of blood, flesh, bones, etc.; what is the 'I' in it? If you thus enquire into the truth, you will realize that there is nothing which is you, nor anything which is 'I'. What is called Punya or Pavana is but a false notion.

However, if you still think 'I am', then in the incarnations past you have had very many relatives. Why do you not grieve for their death? You had many swan relatives when you were a swan, many tree relatives when you were a tree, many lion relatives when you were a lion, many fish relatives when you were a fish. Why do you not weep for them? You were a prince, you were a donkey, you were a peepul tree and then a banyan tree. You were a brahmana, you were a fly and also a mosquito. You were an ant, you were a scorpion for half a year, you were a bee, and now you are my brother. In these many other embodiments you have taken birth again and again countless times.

Even so, I have had very many embodiments. I see them all, and your embodiments too, through my subtle intelligence, which is pure and clear visioned. I was a bird, a crane, a frog, a tree, a camel, a king, a tiger and now I am your elder brother. For ten years I was an eagle, for five months I was a crocodile and for a hundred years I was a lion. Now I am your elder brother. I remember all these and many more embodiments I have passed through in a state of ignorance and delusion. In all these embodiments there were countless relatives. Whom shall I mourn? Considering this, I do not grieve.

All along this path of life relatives are strewn like dry leaves on a forest path. What can be the proper cause for grief or joy in this world, brother? Let us therefore abandon all these ignorant notions and remain at peace. Abandon the notion of the world which arises in your mind as the 'I'. And, be still, neither going up nor falling down! You have no unhappiness, no birth, no father, no mother: you are the Self and naught else. The sages perceive the middle path, they see what is at the moment, they are at peace, they are established in witness consciousness, they shine like a lamp in darkness, in whose light events happen (without the lamp being involved).

VASISTHA continued:

Thus instructed by his brother, Pavana was awakened. Both of them remained as enlightened beings, endowed with wisdom and direct realization. They roamed the forest doing what they pleased but without blemish.

In course of time, they abandoned their embodiment and attained final liberation, as a lamp without fuel.

Craving is the root of all sorrow, O Rama, and the only intelligent way is to renounce all cravings completely is not to indulge them. Even as fire burns all the more fiercely when fed with fuel, thoughts multiply by thinking. Thoughts cease only by the extinction of thinking. Hence, ascend the chariot of non-thinking and with a compassionate and limitless vision behold the worlds sunk in sorrow. Arise, O Rama.

This indeed is the Brahmic state pure, free from craving and from illness. Attaining this, even one who has been a fool is freed from delusion. He who roams the earth with wisdom as his friend and awareness as the female companion, does not become deluded.

There is nothing of value in the three worlds, nothing that one may wish to have which cannot be had by the mind free from craving. They who are cured of the fever of craving do not subject themselves to the successive rise and fall inherent in embodied existence. The mind attains fulfillment only by utter dispassion, not by filling it with desires and hopes. To those who are devoid of any attachment or craving, the three worlds are as wide as the footprint of a calf and a whole world-cycle is but a moment. The coolness of the ice pack on top of the Himalayas is nothing compared to the coolness of the mind of the sage free from craving. The light of the full moon is not as bright nor is the ocean as full nor the face of the goddess of prosperity as radiant as the mind free from craving.

When all the desires and hopes, which are like the branches of the tree of the mind are cut down, the mind resumes its own nature. If you resolutely deny refuge to these hopes and cravings in your mind, then there is no fear for you. When the mind is free from movements of thought (which are motivated by hopes or cravings) then it becomes no-mind, and that is liberation. The thinking that is brought about by hopes and cravings is known as *'vrtti'* (movement of thought); when hopes and cravings are given up, there is no *vrtti* either. When the aggravating cause is removed, the effect ceases to be. Hence, for restoring peace to the mind, remove the disturbing cause, which is hope or craving.

PERSONAL HABITS

By N. R. Krishnamurthy Aiyer

I observed the personal habits of Sri Bhagavan and tried to follow His example. In Bhagavan's daily life one noticed personal cleanliness, tidiness of dress, habitual wearing of vibhuti and kumkum on the forehead; equal sharing of all enjoyments with those around him; strict adherence to a time schedule; performing useful work however 'low' it be; never leaving a work unfinished; the pursuit of perfection in every action; incessant activity except while sleeping or resting after a spell of hard work; never considering oneself superior to others; speaking the truth always, or strict silence if the expression of a truth would hurt or lower the reputation of others; perfect self-help; never asking another to do a piece of work which can be done by oneself; taking full responsibility for failure, if any, without shifting the blame on others; accepting success and failure with equanimity; never disturbing the peace of others; leaving the leaf or plate clean after eating; complete noninterference in the affairs of others; never worrying about the future.

These are the lessons Sri Ramana taught by example to his devotees. We should try to follow the example of the Maharshi with all the strength of the body, mind and spirit.

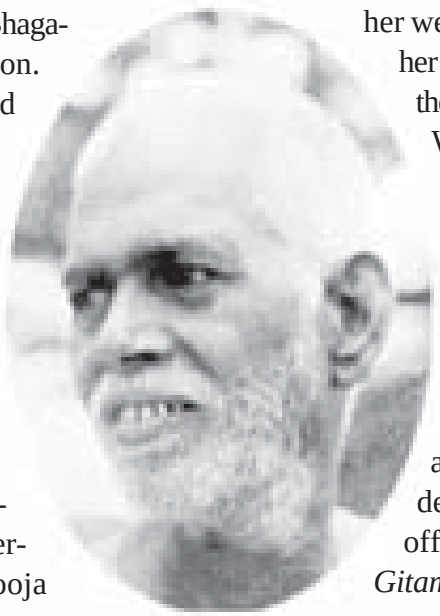
Of what the Maharshi taught in the realm of spirit, words fail and I dare not write.

— Moments Remembered, page 72

Your Glance of Grace

Thank you so very much for giving me the opportunity to share my wonderful experience with you all.

Last Christmas, my sister-in-law arrived from California to visit us after a period of six years. When she came, she brought the glory of Bhagavan's light into our house as well as into our hearts. She presented me with a beautifully framed photo of Bhagavan as a token of her love and affection. When she placed the photo in my hand and explained to me briefly the divine significance of the Maharshi, I was supremely delighted to have it and thanked her for this eternal gift.



The next morning I placed Bhagavan's photo in my pooja room beside the Shiva Lingam that I have been sincerely worshipping since my childhood. When my sister-in-law observed that, she was thrilled and exclaimed saying, "Oh! You found a perfect place for Bhagavan in your pooja room".

Two days later we went to attend the Jayanti program of Bhagavan organized by the Arunachala Ashrama at the New York City Ganesh Temple. This was the first time in my life that I have attended such a program. My sister-in-law came from California specifically to attend this function while my husband and I accompanied her. I never knew anything about Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi until that day, despite the fact that I was born and raised in Southern India. When I walked into the program hall, my eyes immediately fell on the large portrait of the Maharshi placed centrally on the dais. His powerful eyes instantly drew my mind, body and soul towards Him. I just could not divert my eyes from his for even a moment, I felt that my entire individual existence was dissolving into that of Bhagavan's. My heart was filled with ineffable joy and enlightened with his gracious welcome. I was floating with inexplicable peace and happiness within me. That entire day was filled with Bhagavan's power, presence and grace. It was an unforgettable experience. I have seen many photos of enlightened beings, but none of them had ever radiated such peace and joy into my heart.

Six months later my cousin invited me to one of her weekly Satsang sessions. When I went to her house to attend the prayer program, I saw their Guru's portrait placed in her prayer hall. When the prayer was about to commence I bowed my head to pay my respects to their Guru and sat down with the fellow devotees. When I raised my head, I was astonished to see Bhagavan Ramana instead of their Guru in the portrait. I closed my eyes for a moment and when I looked again I still saw the Maharshi. It was an astonishing experience that I could not understand. At the request of the satsangis, I offered to the Maharshi (in my vision) a *Gitamala*, a garland of devotional songs.

At the conclusion of the prayer session, during the *arati*, my cousin requested me to offer holy milk at their Guru's shrine and distribute the *prasad* to the gathering. I started to distribute the milk *prasad* to everyone during which, again to my astonishment, I had the vision of Bhagavan Ramana in each and everyone's face in the gathering. It was an overpowering experience. Uncontrollable tears of joy poured forth from my eyes. This whole experience of having the repeated darshan of Bhagavan Ramana's effulgent face immersed me completely into the divine ocean of His grace and bliss. I was transported to His cosmic regime that was flooded with the nectar of His radiance and splendor. He was omnipresent and all the spatial elements consistently echoed in unison, vibrating, "*Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya*". In a state of beatitude, it took me a while to descend from His galaxy, achieve my normalcy, and resume my worldly activities. Being filled with such ecstasy

I was barely able to serve the prasad, but by Bhagavan's grace I somehow managed to serve all the devotees. For about two weeks after this event I remained immersed in this bliss, which I find difficult to describe.

Through this inexplicable experience, Bhagavan conveyed the message to me that He is in the whole universe and resides in every *jiva* (individual). I am so fortunate to have had this divine experience.

I believe Bhagavan's blessings are with all of us and His grace and blessings will be with all of us forever.

Padma Ranganatha Rajagopal
New Jersey

Letters and Comments

Zen and Pranayama

I have been practicing zazen in the Buddhist tradition for sometime. I recently have been exposed to Sri Ramana Maharshi's work on Self-enquiry and it really feels good.

My question is how to integrate "Who I am?" into my sitting practice? Or do I just stay with the question and forget about integrating.

The "Who Am I?" enquiry almost feels like a Zen koan, though I have not done any koan work. My sitting practice has been with following the breath.

Any thoughts would be greatly appreciated. I am fifty-four and a high scho ol social studies teacher in Colorado.

You can continue with your breathing exercise in conjunction with Self-enquiry. Watching the flow of breath is an aid to Self-enquiry often commented on by Sri Ramana Maharshi. This method of pranayama integrates very well with the Maharshi's main teaching of "Who am I?". Use the 'following the breath' method to still the mind. In fact kumbhaka, *natural breath retention, can be easily achieved by this method. The Maharshi said that the breath is like the horse and the mind the rider. If the horse is restrained, so will the mind and vice versa. Once the thoughts have been stilled you are then best prepared to utilize his direct method of Self-enquiry of "Who Am I?".*

And by the way, the "Who am I?" enquiry is a koan in the Zen tradition. Though it may not have been popular in the past, or presented with the certitude and rational precision as the Maharshi, it nevertheless constitutes a direct method which is uniquely suited for our times and can be employed by astute spiritual seekers of any tradition.

Editor

A Teacher from Sri Ramanasramam

The following letter was sent by the President of Sri Ramanasramam in February 2004 to the Sivananda Yoga Center in Austria. A Swami from the center wrote requesting that a teacher in the lineage of Sri Ramana Maharshi be sent to Austria for conducting classes at their scheduled retreat.

Thank you for your kind letter and request. Sri Swami Sivananda Maharaj was a powerful instrument in the hands of the Divine and seekers of Truth are still benefiting from his dynamic life and teachings. We are happy to read about the work you are doing at the Sivananda Yoga Retreat House in Austria

We are also gratified to read that you wish to introduce the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi into your retreat program. We find that his simple, direct path to Self-realization is reaching a greater number of sincere seekers throughout the world. This is happening mostly in subtle and silent ways, which is quintessential to the message of Sri Maharshi.

We are pleased to note in your letter that on your India *yatras* you sometimes make Tiruvannamalai one of your destinations. You may have noticed that the presence of the Maharshi is still palpably felt within his Ashrama and the towering presence of Arunachala penetrates the pure hearts of those aspirants seeking the omniscient beatitude in the depths of their Hearts. The Maharshi sang hymns in praise of Arunachala. In his "Eight Stanzas to Arunachala" he declares:

"Who is the seer?' When I sought within, I watched the disappearance of the seer and what survived him. No thought of 'I saw' arose; how then could the thought 'I did not see' arise? Who has the power to convey this in words when even Thou (appearing as Dakshinamurti) couldst do so in ancient days by silence? Only to convey by silence Thy (transcendent) state Thou standest as a hill, shining from heaven to earth."

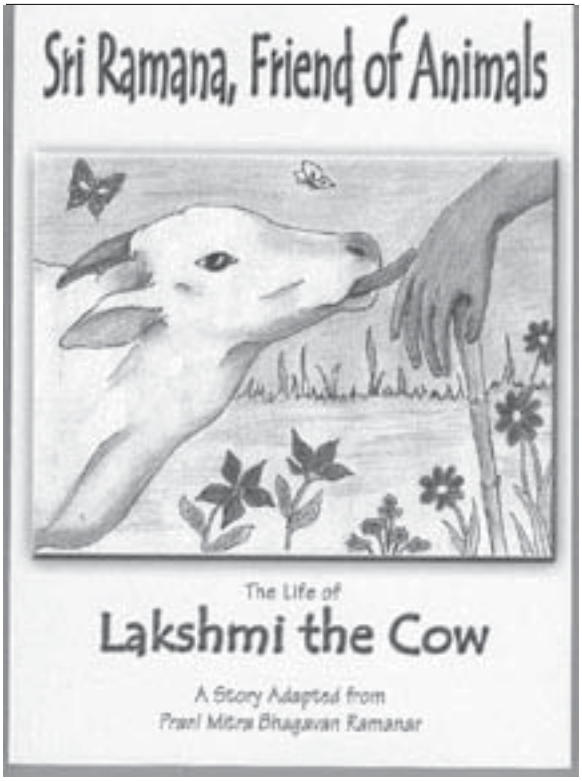
These words of the Maharshi exemplified his ultimate message and means of teaching it: seeking within in silence, while invoking the grace and guidance of Arunachala-Ramana. That is what he bade all his devotees and disciples to do; and sincere seekers continue to do that even now and discover in the depths of their Hearts the everlasting truth, total freedom and bliss.

Therefore, Sri Ramanasramam never envisaged sending out teachers or lecturers to expound Sri Bhagavan's teachings. We have found that his teachings and the influence of his personality continue to reach those earnest seekers whose destinies are somehow linked to him. And the lineage of the Maharshi is available to all who turn within and abide as the Self. It is the same eternal lineage that underlies all manifestation, the core and Heart of all creation, the one Eternal Being, available now, as it has always been. The Maharshi did not create a lineage; he only embodied its everlasting Truth, and by his continual abidance in it, taught others how to experience it.

One practical suggestion: You, or any other qualified Swamiji there, should take up the study of the Maharshi's life and teachings, especially his small work "Upadesa Saram". You can easily understand the essence of the Maharshi's teaching from these thirty verses and pass it on to your guests and friends during your retreat. If you like we can send you a video on Sri Ramana Maharshi's life and teachings to show to your guests. Sincere as you are, you can do very well on your own to understand and pass on the message of the silent sage of Arunachala.

With our deep respect for your work and our warmest regards to all devotees of the Eternal Self in your center,

Yours in Bhagavan,
V. S. Ramanan,
President



The Life of the Cow Lakshmi

The Cow Lakshmi's life was full of facinating episodes and is unequalled in the galaxy of exhalted devotees who lived and walked with Sri Ramana Maharshi. It is no wonder that a truly enchanting book, stringing together events in the life of this fortunate cow, has finally taken shape. Replete with photos, charming illustrations and a story line brought to life through a dramatization, it elicits great interest to the young at heart of all ages. It is printed on quality art paper and adapted from the popular Tamil *Prani Mitra Bhagavan Ramanar.*

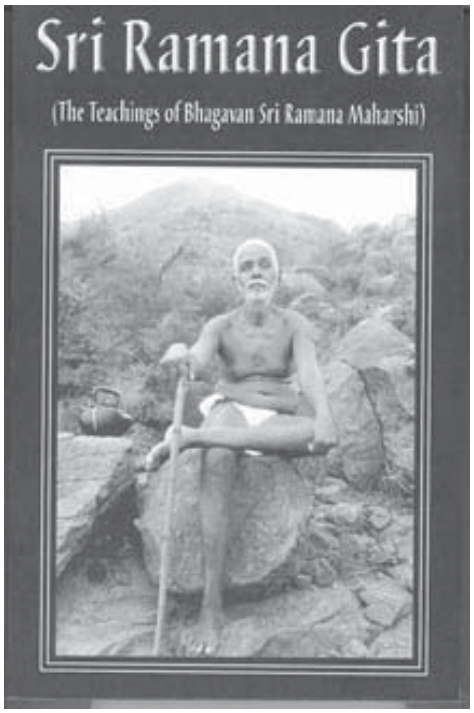
Size: 7 X 10 inches

Pages: 90, Price: $8.00, plus shipping

Mahanyasa Purvaka Rudrabhishekam

All are cordially invited to attend the Mahanyasa Purvaka Rudrabhishekam led by Sri Chalapati Sharma on Saturday, September 25, 2004 at Arunachala Ashrama on Clyde Street in Rego Park.

8:00 AM to 9:30 AM Arunaprashna Parayanam
9:30 AM to 11:00 AM Mahanyasa Parayanam
11:00 AM to 2:00 PM Rudrabhishekam with Ekadasha Rudra Parayanam



Sri Ramana Gita

With Commentary by Kapali Sastriar

Sri Ramana Gita is one of the important works on the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi, composed by his premier devotee Vasishtha Ganapati Muni. It records the instructions of the Maharshi on the most eminent spiritual themes.

The questions taken up in Ramana Gita are often intricate, relating as they do the deepest experiences in yoga and involve very subtle perception and analysis. The commentator, Kapali Sastriar, throws a flood of light on the abstruse points and is of great help for the proper understanding of the high philosophical concepts and deep spiritual import embodied in the teaching of the Maharshi.

300 pages
Price: $13.00

Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation have been going on in a few places near or in large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please contact the individuals below for more information.

Ann Arbor, MI — Gayatri & Mohan (734-623-7199 cedararbor@yahoo.com)

Atlanta Area — Mangalam Kalyanam (678-423-7324) / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

Boston Area — David & Anna Klegon (617-928-1487 /dklegon@rcn.com)

Miami, Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Rubinson (954-755-4758 / arunahill@earthlink.net)

Ottawa, Canada — Anantha Padmanabhan (613-733-8250 / padmanabhan_ananth@hotmail.com)

San Francisco Area — Swaminathan & Sangeeta (510-979-1679 / nachiketas@hotmail.com)

Toronto, Canada — Krishnan & Padma Sastri (905-849-6005 / psastri@hotmail.com)

Washington, D.C. Area — Prakash & Mamtha Adiseshan (703-502-4892 /adiseshan@worldnet.att.net)

THE MAHARSHI is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil Sharma and distributed in North America by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. The newsletter is also delivered by email, attached as a PDF. Send your request to “ashrama@arunachala.org”. This issue and all back issues are available at “http//www.arunachala.org/Publications/NewsLetters”. Books, videos and audio CDs on Sri Ramana Maharshi can also be found on this Web site.